

CLOSING SUMMARY

Mine Action and its Consequences on Peace and Development

Phnom Penh, March 14, 2007

H.E. Sam Sotha and H.E. Donica Pottie

Your Excellency Sok An, Your Royal Highness Prince Mired, Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Participants attending the Phnom Penh regional conference “Mine Action and Implications for Peace and Development” had two excellent days of presentation and discussion and an interesting site visit to the CMAC Training Center in Kampong Chhnang. Fifteen countries participated in the conference. Another ten participated at the various side-events via their embassies in Cambodia. The ASEAN Secretariat was present through-out, as were key international mine action organizations, including the ICBL, ICRC and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).

All participants welcomed Indonesia’s ratification of the Ottawa Treaty.

Participants were given a brief overview of the plans for the 8th Meeting of States Parties (8MSP) which will take place at the Dead Sea in Jordan in November 2007. HRH Prince Mired hoped this meeting would heighten interest in the Mine Ban Treaty in the Middle East, a region of the world with few States Parties. Prince Mired also noted that the 8MSP will strive to create renewed momentum in Mine Action, including between mine-affected states and development partner countries. He later urged States Parties to engage States not party to the Ottawa Treaty at high levels, to encourage universalization.

The ICBL gave some useful scene-setting opening remarks, describing with great clarity the reasons why anti-personnel mines were unacceptable from a humanitarian perspective. Countries which had not yet joined the Treaty were urged to do so without delay.

General Maurice Baril spoke to participants from the perspective of a career military officer. He had once seen anti-personnel landmines as an appropriate part of the "tool kit" for armed forces. However, based on studies and his own experiences, he had been convinced that these weapons should be banned. He described ways that militaries could substitute other techniques and technologies for anti-personnel mines and stressed the importance of including militaries in discussions about the Mine Ban Treaty. Nepal, in a later intervention, agreed that anti-personnel mines have no military utility. Nepal also provided information on its stockpiles, noting that it has 2,700 anti-personnel mines and 300 anti-tank mines.

The conference then moved "set the scene" through presentations outlining the problem and experiences in Mine Action. We will not go into much detail of this overview session in our summary, but will merely hit on some key points.

The ICRC spoke eloquently about the humanitarian consequences of anti-personnel mines, noting that they do not discriminate between soldier and civilian and that they continue to wage war long after wars have ended. The GICHD gave a presentation on the obligations of the Ottawa Treaty and the support that the Centre provides to countries considering joining the Treaty. The ICBL presentation focussed on Southeast Asia and the enormous differences of views about mine action. In this small region, we have Myanmar, which is still using and producing anti-personnel mines, but also strong supporters of the Ottawa Treaty such as Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia.

There were five very interesting and illuminating presentations from Mine-Affected Countries -- Thailand, Lao, Jordan, Nepal and Cambodia. These presentations outlined the scope of the problem, national efforts to address landmines and, in the case of Lao PDR and Cambodia, UXO, and the challenges to those efforts.

The circumstances in the five countries presented were very different. In Jordan and Thailand, landmines were mainly deployed along the border. In Cambodia, landmines were laid more indiscriminately and the country also has to contend with UXO. In Lao PDR, the problem is overwhelmingly related to UXO contamination; participants were shown a map of Lao PDR that illustrated vividly the extent of this problem. In Nepal, landmines have been laid quite recently by insurgents and government forces.

There was a widespread agreement that mines and UXO contamination is linked to poverty. For example, of 47 districts in Lao deemed to be "very poor", 46 are heavily affected by UXO. While Jordan is not as mine-affected as many other countries, as landmines had been deployed in the country's bread-basket, economic development had been affected. Drawing on the comments of Samdech Hun Sen, it was noted that mine action in Cambodia was related to poverty alleviation -- which explained the addition of the 9th Millennium Development Goal.

The link to peace was also made. Nepal's recent Peace Accord included an article committing both sides to work together to provide information on where mines and booby traps had been laid, with a view to their quick destruction.

All agreed that a lack of sufficient financial and human resources was an impediment to mine action. Indeed, this theme was frequently reiterated both by participants from mine-affected countries and those from development partner countries. We were pleased by this common understanding of the importance of resources, and their efficient use.

It was interesting that the five mine-affected states noted similar challenges, including the importance of correct data, the value of national action plans, the utility in separating policy/priority-setting institutions from mine clearance operations, and -- in the case of Ottawa Treaty States Parties -- concern about meeting the obligation to clear all landmines within 10 years of Treaty ratification.

Cambodia's experience with the Level 1 Survey illustrated how better information can inform priority-setting and mine clearance efforts. Lao PDR is trying to develop a database on UXO/mine action in order to have a better information base on the consequences of UXO.

A number of Action Plans were described, which suggests that countries find such plans to be a useful means to mobilize resources and set priorities. Thailand has put in place its Mine Risk Education Action Plan 2007-11. Lao PDR has The Way Forward UXO Plan 2003-2013, linked to the Millenium Development Goals. Cambodia, of course, has a national plan of its own which has been well promulgated throughout the country.

Interestingly, a number of mine-affected countries have concluded that it makes sense to separate policy/priority setting work from the work of mine clearance. Nepal recognized the need to establish a Mine Action Authority, as well as the Mine Action Centre. This separation of functions has already taken place in many other countries.

Thailand and Cambodia voiced concern about meeting the deadline for mine clearance set in the Ottawa Treaty. The GICHD gave an explanation of the process for seeking extensions to the deadline. A key element in this process -- getting in applications for extension nine months before the relevant Meeting of States Parties.

The conference participants also turned their attention to addressing the needs of survivors. The GICHD noted that it was due to the efforts of landmines survivors themselves, including Cambodians Tun Channareth and Song Kosal, that language on meeting the needs of survivors was included. However, the Treaty failed to set out who was responsible for meeting the needs of survivors. Mine-affected states themselves had worked to close this gap. There was agreement that each state should put in place measurable action plans to ensure real and sustained progress.

We then heard from the Disability Action Council and UNICEF on the state of play vis-a-vis meeting the needs of survivors in Cambodia and it was clear that -- while the scale of the problem is challenging -- Cambodia is trying to better meet the needs of disabled people. In this the government is getting considerable help from international and local NGOs.

Both the DAC and UNICEF presentations stressed the importance of the UN Convention on Disabilities, which will open for signature on March 30th. DAC hoped that Cambodia would be in a position to ratify perhaps before the end of 2007. UNICEF drew participants' attention to lessons learned from its programs, including the importance of working with local levels of governments. UNICEF's initiative to pair public servants from MoSAVY with NGO field workers was mentioned as a means to increase the capacity of public servants by allowing them to see firsthand the problems faced by disabled people.

Handicap International in Afghanistan intervened to underline that disabled people do not yet enjoy true equality of rights. He stressed the importance of caring public policies and appropriate laws and called on all governments to ratify the UN Convention.

On the second day of discussions, we had four presentations on international cooperation on mine action, including from Canada, China, Australia and the UNDP.

Canada stressed that only three international arms control instruments included specific articles calling for international cooperation. Thailand intervened later to suggest that this aspect of the Ottawa Treaty was a factor that encouraged countries to join.

China outlined its own efforts to support mine action, including its work in Southeast Asia. But the presentation went beyond that to suggest modalities for cooperation, including the importance of knowledge transfer to build up and sustain national demining efforts and better and more effective cooperation among multiple partners to assist mine-affected countries. This latter suggestion was echoed in the presentations of the UNDP and Australia.

The UNDP presentation focussed on the Clearing for Results Trust Fund, a multi-donor pooled fund that works with CMAA to ensure that priorities are set, mine action is focussed on poverty alleviation, and the land cleared is used for its intended purpose. This could be a worthwhile model for cooperation in other countries.

The Australian presentation outlined Australia's integrated approach to mine action. Lessons learned suggested that mine action worked best when it was integrated with community development and aligned with the local government's development strategy. In a later presentation by the Geneva Centre, the importance of mainstreaming mine action into development priorities was also emphasized.

These presentations were followed by a lively, informative and wide-ranging discussions. Many participants stressed the importance of ensuring that cleared

land was used effectively for poverty reduction. They noted that land security and land titling were important in this regard.

There was a thought-provoking discussion of mine action and peace. AustCare described peacebuilding and conflict resolution as having “three legs” – security, governance and development. Mine Action can support all three “legs” of peace and can also be used as a confidence-building measure between fighting factions. Participants agreed that more work needed to be done to explore the linkage between mine action and peace.

The GICHD is considering developing a toolbox to better connect mine action with peacebuilding processes, drawing on real world examples. The Peace Research Institute of Oslo has done some research in this area and noted that there were clear examples of mine action being used as a CBM.

It was suggested that ASEAN might wish to take a regional view on mine action. The experience of the Organization of American States in doing this was offered as a possible source of ideas in this regard.

This afternoon, presenters from UNDP and the GICHD provided overviews of the work of the UN and the Geneva Centre in facilitating mine action. UNDP noted that three UN agencies – UNDP, UNMAS and UNICEF – are working in 52 countries on mine action programs. One of the useful areas being encouraged by UNDP is cooperation between mine-affected states. The recent visit of an Angolan delegation to CMAA was mentioned as an example.

The GICHD, noting that \$400 million was spent annually on mine action worldwide, described its efforts to make mine action more effective. It also described research efforts and pilot studies on risk management and the Centre’s plans to implement and disseminate appropriate methodologies as soon as feasible.

In closing, we wish to acknowledge all of our speakers and to thank them for their participation. We thank CMAC for arranging an excellent site visit at the training centre in Kampong Chhnang, with demonstrations conducted by CMAC and the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces.

We wish also to thank the landmine survivors who participated in this meeting. They played an active role in the discussions and conversations during our breaks and they also reminded us of why Mine Action is so important.

Thank you.